

ABOUT CHIANG MAI

City of Life & Prosperity



Chiang Mai, a city surrounded by a ring of mountains, has weathered seven hundred years of fascinating history. Chiang Mai has its own very distinctive culture, arts, festivals, and traditions as well as an exciting mix of local, ethnic as well as expatriate communities from all over the world. It has been voted one of the top destinations to live in Asia and is a modern and cosmopolitan city, while not having lost its traditional old charm.

Culture & Society

The Royal Family

The Royal Family is highly revered. No lack of respect or criticism is accepted. The law of lese majesty is alive and well. In many country areas the Royal Anthem is played at eight o'clock in the morning, and at six in the evening when everything grinds to a halt. Be mindful even of offending images of HM the King such as stepping on bank notes, coins, etc.

Etiquette

Thai people are remarkably friendly, but learning a little about the culture will hold you in even greater esteem. Note the foot taboos, feet are considered both vulgar and low, so don't point your feet at anyone or anything. Another important point to remember is not to touch people on the head, try not to even pat young children on the head as President Johnson should have been warned. Thais will be pleased if you wait them on meeting, (join your fingers together and with palms touching, bend your head slightly and touch your nose with the tips of your fingers), but you may well find that the reply is an outstretched hand waiting to be shaken. When offered something such as a glass of water, try and receive it with both hands. Try not to pass between two people who are talking, if you have to, make the gesture of ducking slightly. None of these mistakes would cause you any trouble, but do it right and you will earn respect.

Thai Culture

Don't be embarrassed when you see Thai people kneeling or even crawling before their elders and betters - it is for them perfectly acceptable and in no way humiliating. You do not need to follow suit.

Thai humor is splendid and often very bawdy, however it is sometimes difficult to translate foreign humor, so don't be offended if no one laughs at your jokes.

The class system flourishes here in Thailand. Things you can do and say with one person may not go down at all well with another. If you learn a little Thai from a friend who may use lots of slang, another friend will know exactly where you

have been - so be careful! Accent has little place in Thai so by changing the words you use you can easily alter your social position.

It is better not to ask negative questions as Thais do not know whether to say yes or no in reply. Yes in Thai can mean many things. "Yes, I heard you but I haven't a clue what you mean". "Yes, I heard you, I understand what you want but I don't agree with you and I won't do it". Yes, I heard you, I agree with you and I will try and do it".

Try to keep calm and relaxed whatever the provocation or however frustrated you may be. Be polite, smile, try and make a joke, don't rush things and try to speak softly. Thais are adept at working things out in their own way and they do not like confrontation.

Don't show too much naked flesh in the cities or even at lakes or waterfalls although on the beach it is acceptable.

Dress

In the north of Thailand, especially if you go up into the mountains, it can be very cold. Between November and February the temperature can fall to 4 degrees Celsius, so bring a sweater.

During the rest of the year, except in the mountains, the temperature is between 25 and 40 degrees. Unless you have formal engagements, you are most unlikely ever to be required to wear anything other than a t-shirt and trousers or a simple dress.

Tourist Tips

Always take out full insurance in case the worst happens.

Do not overstay your visa. The current fine is 500 baht per day - and with no maximum this will add up very quickly. If you are in trouble immediately contact your embassy - they may grumble but they are paid to be there for you and help you in any way they can.

The legal system is highly complicated and very slow, so never consider going to law unless absolutely necessary. If you have a problem take advice from your embassy or if you can, from someone you trust and know the country well. Lawyers and the police are a last resort. Sad but true.

Stick to well-known brands of bottled water. Tap water is not recommended although it is said to be safe for brushing your teeth with. Remember that ice, except in first class outlets, is almost certainly not made from bottled water.

Tipping is, as almost everywhere, a difficult subject. Large hotels and restaurants usually add 10% to the bill so you only need to add a tip if you have received exceptional service or if you are rich and famous. At the other end noodle shops and food stalls do not expect a tip. In between it is up to you, but leaves the odd coin or small note if you can afford it or feel that it is deserved.

If you are sensible you will find Thailand one of the safest and most friendly countries in the world.

What are Thais Doing?

Ever wondered what Thai people are doing when they...

There are many things Thais do that confound and confuse foreigners. Here are some examples and explanations of them.

Spirit House Offerings

In spite of being a Buddhist country, traces of animism and non-Buddhist spiritual beliefs still abound in Thailand. Most of these would be found outside the city, but one such superstition found everywhere from the heart of Bangkok's business district to a southern island is a spirit house. It is believed that there are spirits who live in the land and by building a house or utilizing the land the spirit is disturbed and can sometimes be disgruntled. To appease the homeless spirit as well as ensure its happiness and patronage, small houses are usually erected following a small religious ceremony whereby the spirits can reside in peace. Food and drink offerings are often placed in these houses and sometimes little effigies of people or animals can also be seen residing in them. Man and spirit can therefore live in close harmony.

Some particularly impressive spirit houses are Brahmin and contain images of Vishnu or Shiva. Many of these shrines, such as the one in Bangkok near the Erawan Hotel, are highly revered. Brahmanism is intimately entwined with Buddhism, particularly in such Royal ceremonies as the annual Pouching.

Taking off Shoes

For hygiene purposes, houses in Thailand are shoe-free. It is considered most rude to drag dirty shoes into Thai houses. This certainly extends to all temple buildings as well as some businesses and restaurants. A safe way to make sure that you are doing the right thing would be to look around at any building entrance for signs of shoes and take yours off if you see that everyone else has.

Releasing Birds and Fish

Much merit is obtained by freeing captive animals. This can be done on any special day such as a birthday or anniversary but is most often seen during the Songkran Festival (The Thai New Year celebrated in April). Little birds can be bought to set free at many temples and shrines. Fish are released in temple ponds, where they will breed in safety or

in the rivers and lakes. Sometimes even turtles, shell fish and eels are bought from markets and set free to save them from the wok.

Wai at Objects

The wai is a form of greeting in Thailand used for young and old, rich and poor, monks and Royalty. The wai is an essential part of every Thai's daily life. However, sometimes foreigners get confused when they see a Thai wai a tree or a shrine or even a curve on the road.

This is very normal as sometimes certain trees or areas are said to have powerful spirits and it is as a mark of respect for the spirit that some Thais will lift two hands together in front of their chests and bow their heads - this can be dangerous when driving.

Giggling at Accidents

Most foreigners are completely bemused when they find themselves in a near collision with someone Thai and all they will get is giggles and a smile. This is because Thais would rather make light of something than lose face. It would be a loss of face to admit that ones bad driving could have nearly caused an accident so the best thing to do is to laugh about it.

Chiang Mai Facts

History



There has been continuous habitation in what is now Thailand for over 10,000 years. Thailand lies between the two great civilisations of India and China and it has been much influenced by the both. Coastal trade came up the river to Siam, as the old capital now known as Ayutthaya, was called. Elephants or ox carts also carried goods across the narrow isthmus to avoid the long and pirate infested route through the Malacca Strait.

Over the centuries great Empires rose and fell in South East Asia - most of them being maritime states feeding off the merchants who traded along the coast. Such was Srivijaya based, some say, in Sumatra, the Khmer Empire of Angkor and the powerful kingdoms of Burma. Far to the north lay China, which sometimes stretched its tentacles down to the south.

Lanna, as the kingdom whose capital was called Chiang Mai, sits right in the middle of all these powers - a land-locked country surrounded and divided by forests and great mountain ranges straggling down from the Himalayas.

By 1300 A.D. the Thai people, moving out from the peripheral areas of China, had established themselves in the northern parts of Thailand. The two most important Thai kingdoms were Lanna and Sukothai, which was, a hundred years later, absorbed into Siam based at Ayutthaya. By the middle of the fifteenth century Lanna was firmly established, it fought successful wars against Siam over disputed territory and it became a major centre of Buddhist studies, hosting the Seventh World Buddhist Conference in 1477. Chiang Mai was also the key market on the trade routes from Yunnan to the Burmese ports where goods arrived from, and were sent to, India and beyond.

In 1557 the Burmese attacked the Thai world, utterly destroying Siam and turning Chiang Mai into a vassal state. For the next two hundred years Chiang Mai was an impoverished backwater cut off from the rest of the world and neglected by its rulers - it disappeared from the pages of history.

In 1767 Burma struck at Siam again and reduced the great city of Ayutthaya to a pile of rubble and it never recovered, the capital was recreated at Bangkok. Slowly the kingdom of Siam recovered under the new Chakri Dynasty.

A city and a region steeped in tradition and **history**, **Chiang Mai** has weathered seven hundred years of fascinating history.

Chiang Mai, after being deserted for twenty years following the Burmese onslaught, was gradually repopulated and willingly gave its allegiance to the king of Siam. But the journey up the river to Chiang Mai was slow and difficult so that the Prince of Chiang Mai was virtually an independent ruler. The first American Presbyterian missionary to reach the north from Bangkok in 1867 records that the journey took him exactly three months. McGilvary's mission brought in the modern age - as well as, largely unsuccessfully, spreading the gospel, he also introduced modern medicine and education.

Towards the end of the century British teak companies in Burma began to seek concessions in the north of Thailand. There were frequent conflicts with the Prince who saw nothing wrong with leasing the same concession to two different people. Problems with the missionaries and the teak companies together with fears of British and French intentions along the borders finally forced the Bangkok Government to take firm control of Chiang Mai and the rest of the north in the 1890's. All real power was removed from the Prince and the last hereditary ruler died in 1939. In 1921 the railway blasted its way through the encircling mountains and Chiang Mai became an integral and loyal part of Siam, or Thailand as it came to be called in 1949.

The inhabitants of Chiang Mai are, as one would expect in a city situated at the crossroads of mainland South East Asia, a very mixed lot. The people living in the valleys think of themselves as Thais with a difference - they have their own distinct language and are in fact a mixture of Mon, Lawa, Lao and Thai Lue amongst others. To the west live many Shan and Karen while in the mountains, over the past hundred years, tens of thousands of hilltribe people have settled after fleeing from troubles in Burma, Laos and China - Hmong, Akha, Lisu, Musser, Yao and the long necked Padaung. There are also many overseas Chinese, Chin Haw Muslim traders from Yunnan and increasing numbers of Europeans and Americans who have come to live in the beautiful and gentle valley of Chiang Mai.

Location



Chiang Mai valley averages 310 metres (1,027 feet) above sea level, and the province covers 20,107 square kilometres (12,566,910 rai). The widest point of the province measures 136 kilometres (85 miles), and the longest 320 kilometres (200 miles).

To the north, a 227 kilometre (141.88 miles) stretch of mountains divides Chiang Mai's northern districts of Fang and Mae Ai from the region around Kengtung in the Shan State of Myanmar (Burma). On the east, Chiang Mai is bordered by Chiang Rai, Lampang and Lamphun provinces. The Mae Tuen River, Ream Mountains and Luang Mountains separate Chiang Mai's south from the province of Tak. Some stretches of Chiang Mai's south also border Lamphun province. To the west, Chiang Mai is bordered by Mae Hong Son province.

Topography

A large part (>82%) of Chiang Mai's land is covered by mountains and forests. The mountain ranges generally run in a north-south alignment through the province and give birth to several streams and tributaries (such as the Mae Chaem, Mae Ngat and Mae Klang) which in turn feed important rivers and irrigation canals (such as the Muand and Faay) which provide the water necessary to Chiang Mai's agriculture.

Chiang Mai's largest and most important river is the Ping, which originates in the mountains north of Chiang Dao and flows southwards for 540 kilometres (337.5 miles). It is along the banks of this river that Chiang Mai's flat valley area lies.

Chiang Mai is also home to Thailand's highest mountain, Inthanon Mountain, which stands 2,565 metres (8,498 feet) above sea level.

Weather

In relation to the rest of Thailand, Chiang Mai is considered to be quite cool with an average yearly temperature of 25.4°C. The highest temperatures are in the low 40s and the lowest 5-10°C. There are three seasons in Northern Thailand: summer (hot and humid), rainy (wet - monsoon) and winter (cool and dry).

Come to Chiang Mai in summer (March-June) and you will at times find the weather quite uncomfortably hot, though the skies are clear. However, because of the lack of rain, vegetation and the countryside can appear to be quite barren and dry. In the rainy season (July-October) you will be lucky to get a week of clear skies, but monsoon rains can be beautiful and the mountains are lush and green. The favourite time for many visitors is therefore in winter (November-February) when temperatures drop to a pleasant cool with bright sunshine and clear blue skies. There is also an abundance of flowers, making this a time when Chiang Mai is at her prettiest.

Religion

For centuries past, Chiang Mai has been the centre of religious activity in Northern Thailand. During the Lanna era, Buddhism was the main religion that flourished and grew. Evidence of this is seen in the many ancient temples in Chiang Mai.

Currently, approximately 85% of the people in Chiang Mai are Buddhist. There are 1,253 temples in the province. Important religious functions and ceremonies are held at the Chiang Mai Buddhist Association, which also serves as an office for the Buddhist Youth Club. This club holds religious discussions and sermons on wan phra (Buddhist holidays).

Other religions are also present. Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam and Hinduism are all represented with 92 Protestant churches, 53 Catholic churches, 14 mosques, 1 Hindu temple, 1 Bahai temple and 1 Jewish synagogue.

People and Culture

Chiang Mai Province has a population of some 1,600,000 of whom 172,000 live in Chiang Mai city. 80% of the people are locals by birth and speak kam muang, which is a language close to Siamese but which has its own distinctive script. The other 20% is made up of southern Thais, Chinese, Indians and an increasing number of farang (foreigners).

The term khon muang refers to all the people living in Lanna or upper northern Thailand which is made up of the provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lampang, Lamphun, Phrae, Nan, Phayao and Mae Hong Son.

The original inhabitants were the Lawa (as it were the Celts of Europe) and the Mons with their Kingdom of Hariphunchai base on present day Lampang and Lamphun. By the thirteenth century various Thai tribes had moved into and taken control of the fertile river valleys, defeated the Mon and pushed the Lawa into the hills.

Lanna was over-run by Burma in 1558 and they were not finally driven out until 1775. The legacy of those sad years is still to be seen in some architecture and customs. For twenty years after the withdrawal of the Burmese the city of Chiang Mai was deserted and much of the rest of Lanna depopulated.

Gradually the new ruler of Chiang Mai, Kavila, took control. He brought in Thai tribes from the north, Ngieo, Khoen, Thai Yai, Thai Lu, Yuan and Lao to till the land and populate the towns. It is this mix of people who are today proud to call themselves khon muang.

Artifacts & Crafts

The tropical climate has left Chiang Mai very little in the way of a cultural heritage. Some brick or laterite religious buildings remain from the fifteenth century and earlier, but most structures were made from teak and have been lost, so that now there are very few that are more than a hundred years old.

Written records do not go back further than the seventeenth century, although some chronicles from that period quote much older sources, historians find them difficult to work from and the task of sifting fact from myth is fraught with difficulty. There are also stone inscriptions and beautiful Buddha images in bronze and stone that date from the fourteenth century. However there is little knowledge of the people and their history, their art and crafts. There is a sort of barrier around the year 1300 AD except for a glimpse of the earlier Mon Kingdom of Hariphunchai, which was situated where Lamphun stands today.

The greatest body of knowledge is ceramics, superb glazed stoneware celadons and brown glazed wares as well as some decorated with black under the glaze which were made at a number of kiln sites in the north of Thailand in the Lanna period. These pieces show that the craftsmen and artists of Lanna had reached a very high level of technical and artistic excellence and that they were supplying a local market sufficiently sophisticated to appreciate things of great beauty. The ceramic tradition died after the fall of Lanna in the middle of the sixteenth century, but was revived some hundred years ago. Chiang Mai now has over twenty ceramic factories producing superb natural celadons and other glazed, decorated wares that are exported all over the world.

The nearby city of Lampang is a major centre of ceramic production. Fine porcelain, stoneware, earthenware and building materials are made: that pair of miniature blue and white clogs you bought in Amsterdam were most likely made in Lampang.

Silverware has long been produced both by the Thai people of the north and by the various hilltribes who melted down Indian rupees to make decorative items for their womenfolk and as a bank and indication of their wealth. Some old pieces can be found and beautiful modern reproductions are being made. The descendants of the old northern royal families have preserved some superb examples of the silversmiths art.

A wealth of textile heritage can be found and studied by the many that are captivated by the beauty of this art. The hill tribe people all wove their own distinctive fabric and it is this that distinguishes the different groups - the Hmong, Akha, Lisu, Musser, etc. The lowlanders, the various Thai groups, the Lao and the Mon, Burmese and Cambodians all

produced their own distinctive patterns woven with loving care in cotton or silk some with threads of gold or silver. Beautiful and intricate pieces can still be found kept in cupboards for over a century by the descendants of old families and if you go to a festival or an important function you will see them gracefully worn. Textiles are still hand-woven today and made into fashionable designer clothes.

Lacquer ware has been found in fifteenth century gravesites and it was a common household product until some fifty years ago. The beautiful red lacquer ware with delicate black decoration is now a collectors item and modern factories only make a rather simple black lacquer ware with gold or coloured decoration.

Woodcarving, bronze wares, silk, cotton, hand-made sa (mulberry) paper products and umbrellas are among the many handicrafts that are still made today in Chiang Mai and exported the world over.

There are some beautiful temple murals dating from the nineteenth century. Also illuminated folding books on religious, astrological or medical subjects. In recent years there has been a great upsurge in highly creative painting, some modern, others based on traditional Lanna styles.

Music and dancing have always been at the center of royal, as well as village temple, festivals and celebrations. The traditions have been improved and expanded and are now featured on a wide variety of occasions such as weddings, birthdays, and religious festivals.

Festivals & traditions

The Chiang Mai Flower Festival (February)



Once a year the streets of Chiang Mai explode in a kaleidoscopic array of colour as the Flower Festival commences.

Towards the end of the cool season, in early February, Chiang Mai is looking its best. Everywhere there is a riot of colour as temperate flowers such as asters, salvias and marigolds come into full bloom to join the tropical orchids and bougainvilleas.

This is the time when the glorious Flower Festival takes place. Some fifty villages as well as other private and government organisations compete to create the most spectacular floral floats. These are covered overall with flower heads in intricate designs and made in the shape of dragons, castles, mountains and so on. Atop each float sits a beautiful girl dressed in sumptuous northern Thai costume.

The procession wends its way slowly through the streets of the city, which are lined with throngs of people cheering their favourite competitor. When the procession finally reaches Suan Buak Had Park, the flowers and the girls by now somewhat limp from the heat, the winners are announced.

At the Park there are competitions for various categories of flowers, fruit and vegetables, for flower arrangements and miniature gardens as well as hundreds of stalls selling everything you can imagine. The festival is very popular and hotels are generally rather full so be warned to book in advance.

Songkran Festival (April)



The history and traditions of the famous **Songkran festival**:

The ancient Kingdom of Lanna came into existence with the founding of Chiang Mai by King Mengrai in 1296. There is, however, strong evidence from old chronicles that the site had been inhabited for many years by Lawa people who lived in the area long before the coming of the Thai. By the time of King Mengrai, Thai people had spread across the heartland of mainland Southeast Asia, from Assam through Yunnan, Laos, Siam and Lanna, to Vietnam and Hainan - it is highly probable that many of their shared traditions and beliefs date back some two thousand years.

Over the centuries these original beliefs have been overlaid by influences from China and India, in particular, Hinduism and Buddhism. Songkran or Paveni Pi Mai, the New Year Festival, is, together with the worship of the Rice Goddess and a wide range of ancestral, ground and water spirits, a remembrance from those most ancient days.

New Year in Thailand is highly complicated. The first month of the year in Lanna starts on the full moon in October, which marks the end of the Buddhist three month lent. The Siamese and Shan people consider the first month to start two moons later. In 1889 the Siamese government decreed that the new year should start on April 1st. In 1940, to comply with western practice January 1st became the official New Year. However, the citizens of Chiang Mai know that the real Pi Mai must be celebrated in the middle of April and in 1990 the Thai government made April 13th, 14th and 15th national holidays for the whole country. This is the time when the sun shifts from the sign of Pisces to the sign of Aries. This is one of the great Rites of Passage. The blessing of rain soon to come can be looked forward to and prayed for. The days are getting longer, light is once again overcoming darkness, the slow, hot and tedious days will soon be forgotten and rejuvenation, renewed hope and fertility are in the air. Soon the life giving rains will enable rice to be planted.

Onto these primitive ideas have been grafted Hindu, Buddhist and Shaman beliefs and, today, the whole mix has become one long, joyous celebration - the greatest waterfight in the world - much of the original meaning of the Songkran celebrations has been lost. And this is scarcely surprising given the sad history of Lanna. Following the years of its greatness in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Lanna was occupied by the Burmese for two hundred years and became a neglected backwater. After the Burmese had destroyed the Thai world for the second time in 1767, the city of Chiang Mai was deserted for twenty years, it was reoccupied by a motley assortment of people, and finally was absorbed as a province of Siam, as Thailand was then called, at the end of the nineteenth century. Most local traditions were lost or suppressed.

The first day of the festival is the last day of the old year. Houses are spring-cleaned, clothes washed and Buddha statues and amulets blessed with lustral water. Up until the 1930's the Jao or Prince of Chiang Mai would go down to the River Ping and ceremoniously pour out sacred water to wash away all the sorrows and problems incurred by his people in the old year. He would then go in procession to pay his respects to the most important Buddha statues in the city.

The second day was an in-between sort of day when people prepared for the New Year which would start on the 14th. It was a day of fun and relaxation and the throwing of water intensified. Girls were allowed and encouraged to become physically and sexually aggressive, bawdy singing competitions were held between groups of boys and girls. Many a village romance started at this time.

New Year's day is a time for making merit in the local wat or temple, merit made this day will go to the ancestors - your own and also those of the village and the King. It is also the day when respect is paid to parents, elders, teachers and those who have helped you in the past year. Their forgiveness is asked for whatever you may have done wrong in the past year whether unintentionally or deliberately. Many think that this Dam Hua ceremony is the origin of the orgy of water throwing but in fact the recipient takes a few drops of water from the bowl offered and touches them to his own head, he will then sprinkle some on the hands of those who came to ask for his blessing.

It is only in very recent years that an effort has been made to revive, or recreate, a Lanna heritage. Much of the pageantry associated with the Songkran Festival - the Beauty Competition, the parade of girls on bicycles, the dances and drumming displays, etc.- have been newly created for the benefit of tourists.

Whatever is old, whatever is new, for a week in the middle of the dry heat of April, Chiang Mai is awash with joyous fun and boisterous young people taking part in the greatest water fight in the world.

Inthakin Ceremony (May or June)



A unique ceremony held in Chiang Mai every year, visitors are welcome to join in and observe.

The annual rites connected with the sao inthakhin or pillar of Chiang Mai City, begin on the 13th day of the waning moon in the eighth Northern lunar moon and continue until the second day of the waxing moon of the ninth month (It is difficult to find anyone who can tell you the exact dates but it is usually sometime in June). What is this famous Chiang Mai ceremony all about and what are its origins?

Old chronicles and modern experts have differing views. Some maintain that the lak muang or city pillar is a form of lingam and that the ceremony is a rite of fertility and rejuvenation as the rainy season begins. Others deny any phallic connotation and say that the lak muang - and many other regional Thai cities also have them - represents the centre of power of the local ruler.

The suwan kham daeng legend relates the story of the original city of Chiang Mai, which was founded by Lawa people before the birth of the Lord Buddha. At that time the city was in dead trouble, beset by demons. A certain hermit asked for help from the god Indra who gave them a protecting stone pillar and also much wealth for he knew that Chiang Mai was to become a great centre of Buddhist learning.

In the course of time, however, the people came to break the taboos and the guardian kumphan demons took the pillar away whereupon disaster struck. Again Indra was asked to help and he agreed to replace the pillar. This was the one that King Mengrai found amongst the ruins when he came to build his capital in 1296.

He found out from the Lawa prince what the pillar was and how it should be propitiated. This, much altered no doubt, is the ceremony that we see today. The inthakhin is kept in a pavilion which no women are allowed to enter, in the grounds of wat chedi luang although it was not always there. If, and only if, the pillar is treated with due respect, Chiang Mai and all who live in her, will be prosperous, happy and safe.

Today the ceremony is organised by the Municipal Council together with many other groups and the Buddhist elements are stressed together with respect for authority, but nor are ancestors and the spirits of the city forgotten. An associated ceremony, pithee suab jata muang, is performed at the four city corners, the five city gates and at the Three Kings Monument, to ensure the continued long life of Chiang Mai.

Pu Sae - Ya Sae Ceremony (June)



A particularly gruesome animist ceremony still performed by some in Chiang Mai.

According to tradition, Pu Sae and Ya Sae are the guardian spirits of Chiang Mai, who now roam the slopes of Doi Suthep. The original inhabitants of this area were the Lawa who in early days are thought to have been cannibals and this is closely bound up with the Pu Sae - Ya Sae ritual as it is practised today. Legend has it that the Lord Buddha visited Chiang Mai. These two, brother and sister, followed him with the intention of killing and eating him. The Buddha stopped and spoke to them and managed to persuade them to give up their cannibalistic ways. They pleaded with him to be allowed to eat buffalo flesh instead, even if only once a year.

So it is that once a year at the beginning of the rainy season, usually in May, a buffalo is ritually sacrificed. Formerly the Prince of Chiang Mai presided over the ceremony, which was also attended by Buddhist monks. This very ancient occasion now seems to be an attempt to bring together Shamanism and Buddhism and also to unite the Lawa people, some of whom still live in the area, and the Thais who replaced them.

In the words of the Pu Sae - Ya Sae invocation, 'Let not the rice of the Lawa die in their swiddens; let not the rice of the Thai wither and die in their paddies.' Clearly the association between Lawa and Northern Thai is both long and close.

Loy Krathong (October or November)



One of the most beautiful festivals in Thailand, Loy Krathong, is held on the night of the full moon of the 12th month of the Thai calendar every year - around November.

The people of Thailand have had a close relationship with water since ancient times. As a farming people, the Thais always used to build their homes and villages near rivers, for they depended on their waters for their crops as well as for a means to travel from one part of the country to the next. Generation after generation of Thais have been sustained by these waters, so water is held in deep respect. From this respect comes one of the most important festivals of the year.

During the festival the rivers become full of floats, known as krathong, which are of different shapes and sizes. They are beautifully decorated with both fresh and dry flowers. With candles lit, they become like stars drifting through the heavens made bright by the light of the full moon reflected on the surface of the waters. The beauty of this scene and the atmosphere of celebration have made the festival famous for Thais and foreigners alike.

Though the manner of celebration and the conduct of rituals varies in each part of Thailand, the underlying purpose of showing respect and gratitude towards water is the same.

One of the most interesting objects is the colourful khom loy, or hot air balloon. Built in a variety of shapes and sizes, they are released into the sky during the day and night. Burning wicks are placed in those that are released at night. The lanterns in the sky and the lamps on the ground adorn the sky and the city with a myriad of lights, while all around firecrackers blaze and explode like thunder. This is an atmosphere you can enjoy only in the Yi Peng festival of Chiang Mai.

The festival is made even more lively by the activities of the municipality and private enterprise, which co-operate to put on dazzling shows.

Education

Some cities seem to have been created to be seats of learning - ideal places both for teachers and students. Chiang Mai is such a city.

Chiang Mai is home to six universities, Buddhist and Christian seminaries, technical colleges, six international schools and one German one, a large university teaching hospital and several private ones, some with nursing schools. There are also many private language schools as well as the AUA, the British Council, Australian and New Zealand centres and the Alliance Francaise.

All this means that there are many opportunities for native English language teachers, especially if they have a university degree and teaching qualifications. The many Thai schools are hungry to employ English teachers.

The international schools cater for the children of expatriates living in Thailand and are increasingly attracting Thai children and those from neighbouring countries, whose parents want them to be educated in English. Universities are offering more and more courses in English and are anxious to establish exchange programmes for overseas students and lecturers.

All this activity results in a stimulating environment - students exchanging ideas at the food stalls around the university or picnicking beside the lake at the foot of the mountain; English teachers relaxing after a hard day's work in the quiet bars and restaurants along the banks of the River Ping.

In the age of cyberspace and satellite dishes, Chiang Mai, only one hour's flight from Bangkok, is no longer an isolated outpost. It is, in fact, a regional centre of communications, the gateway to Burma, Laos and southern China.

Chiang Mai is a safe, healthy and stimulating place for students, and a low cost, convenient and idyllic heaven for teachers.

Six years of primary education are compulsory and free for all Thai children, although there are certain small expenses

for uniforms, books and writing materials. Some children fall through the net either because their parents can not afford even these expenses, because they live far from any school or because they do not have Thai citizenship. There are government and private charity scholarships that help poorer children complete their secondary education. Many of the schools in Chiang Mai are excellent - four of the best were founded by Christian missionaries, although there is no religious pressure on the children. Universities, technical colleges and vocational schools offer a wide range of subjects for those who wish or are able to go on to further education. Fees are not high but are still out of the reach of many, but again there are government and private charity scholarships.

Chiang Mai a city of good health

Chiang Mai, the largest city in the north of Thailand, was founded by King Mengrai as the capital of the Kingdom of Lanna on Thursday, 12th April 1296 AD.

Today Chiang Mai is the tourist, business, educational and health centre for the region.

Chiang Mai has retained many of its ancient traditions and its unique culture. It is blessed with a healthy climate and outstanding natural beauty, surrounded as it is by forests and mountains.

Chiang Mai attracts visitors from such neighbouring countries as Bangladesh, Burma, China, India and Laos and, indeed, from all over the world. Although most visitors come for pleasure, more and more are also taking the opportunity to sample the excellent health facilities that are so speedily available at such reasonable cost.

The Chiang Mai Health Service Promotion Association consisting of both government and private sectors, ensures standards and quality in the fields of Medical and Dental Care, Traditional Thai Massage, Spas and Herbal Medicine.

We look forward to being of service to you.

Dental Care



In 1935 the Minutes of the Chiangmai Gymkhana Club recorded, **it was decided that the club should take the initiative in inviting a dentist from Bangkok to visit Chiang Mai at Christmas.**

Today there are sixty-five dental practices in Chiang Mai, there are specialist dental hospitals, all major hospitals have a dental clinic and the University Teaching Hospital has a dental faculty that provides undergraduate and postgraduate education and is also a source of knowledge and research for the profession. Contact is maintained with overseas establishments and frequent seminars are held thus ensuring that all dentists in Chiang Mai are kept up-to-date with the latest technology.

Overseas visitors are guaranteed prompt treatment using the very latest equipment at remarkably reasonable prices.

I cancelled my holiday when I found that I needed extensive dental surgery that would cost US\$10,000. A friend advised me not to cancel but to come to Chiang Mai for treatment. I was met at the airport by the dentist, all my problems were solved and I then had a marvellous two week holiday all for less than US\$5,000 Hannah from Israel.

Spas



Until very recently a spa (called after a small town of that name in Belgium - a very popular resort in the early nineteenth century) was a health resort at which natural waters or baths could be taken by people suffering from rheumatism and

kindred complaints.

Today spas have changed out of all recognition, and nowhere more so than in Chiang Mai. The Lanna tradition of massage and of herbal remedies for the treatment of physical and mental conditions reaches far back in northern peoples memories; methods and recipes have been handed down through matriarchal lineage from generation to generation.

Thai Lanna spas have grafted this ancient knowledge onto the new wave of international spas to create something very special.

Whether you wish to sooth your senses after a period of stress or a long flight. Or perhaps get a jump start to a more healthy life style, or simply to indulge yourself with a little pampering spas are increasingly popular destinations whether for a vacation or a one day getaway.

Thai Lanna spas base their treatments on a variety of ancient and modern practices from water, aromatic and Ayurvedic systems to hot stone and Swedish massage, to achieve good health, healing, complete relaxation and soul rejuvenation. The atmosphere at the spas, the gentle grace and skill of the masseuses make this an experience of a lifetime.

Medical Care



Dr. McGilvary of the American Presbyterian Mission arrived in Chiang Mai in 1867 with his wife and two children. The journey up the river from Bangkok took them three months. He was the first to introduce modern medicine to the people of Lanna quinine for malaria and vaccination for the prevention of smallpox.

Today there is an internationally renowned teaching hospital at the heart of Chiang Mai University which provides support and up-to-date knowledge to the sixteen private hospitals in the province.

Many of the doctors who graduated from the university have obtained further qualifications overseas in various fields of expertise. The very latest state-of-the-art equipment is installed in all the leading hospitals.

Emergency care, accident trauma, cosmetic surgery, long-term residential care of the elderly; all aspects of medical care, supported by the famed attention of Thai nurses, are all immediately at your service and the cost is surprisingly reasonable.

Please visit the directory page for contact details of hospitals and clinics in Chiang Mai.

Herbal Medicines



For centuries herbal medicines have been used in conjunction with incantations and massage to treat physical and spiritual malaise. Herbs, algae and mushrooms were gathered in the forests and dispensed by monks and village elders.

Today there is a strong movement back to these simple medicines long despised by western science.

Herbal healing traditions have deep roots in Lanna. Herbal heat compresses, steam treatment and Thai massage are derived from folk lore and ancient midwifery techniques. Today, natural products and aromatherapy are respected and widely practiced as one of the most popular complementary medicine therapies.

Many Thai herbs are used in cooking or as drinks green algae found in fresh water ponds is used as a substitute for meat in larb; it is rich in vitamin A and calcium.

Essential oils from plants and flowers are used by spas as a natural adjunct to massage, inhalation and steam baths sweet basil is refreshing, lemon oil is stimulating, lemongrass eases indigestion, the scent of jasmine relaxes the central nervous system.

The herbs found in the mountains and forests of Chiang Mai are good for just about any ailment as well as simply making you feel good.

Traditional Thai Massage



The ancient practice of relaxing massage was passed on from generation to generation in the farming families of Lanna.

In the 1830s King Rama III set up a massage and herbal medicine school at Wat Pho in Bangkok. Today it is still the premier school for students and most of the best northern masseuses have graduated from there.

The various types of traditional Thai massage can be categorised as follows:-

- 1) For general relaxation, the relief of fatigue and nervous tension, to stimulate the blood and improve physical fitness.
- 2) To cure simple ailments such as muscle pain, stiffness, cramp, low back pain and to help the elderly or paralysed who are unable to exercise.
- 3) Foot massage which is adapted from Chinese foot reflexology and which helps to stimulate and improve activities of the internal organs.
- 4) Even though the science of oil massage originated in the west, the people of Lanna have from ancient times used fragrances and herbs to enhance the health giving benefits of massage.
- 5) Some masseuses are specially trained to massage young babies, giving a warm and loving touch.

Thai traditional massage is often combined with a full spa experience, but there are also many traditional massage parlours and schools where you can yourself learn the art.

Please check out our directory section for contact details.

Transportation

If you hire a car or motorbike make sure it is insured. A motorbike can be hired for as little as 150 baht per day and a car for 800. If you do not have an international driving license, check that your country's license is valid in Thailand. Remember that in Thailand people (usually) drive on the left side of the road. Road signs are surprisingly well posted and you will find Chiang Mai (province, not city) a pleasure to drive around. The city can be rather hectic with its mass of one-way systems.

Only in Bangkok do most taxis have meters - Chiang Mai has fewer than 20 - and these are sometimes not used, so always negotiate your fare or insist the meter is turned on. Also always negotiate your fare before you get into a tuk tuk or a Chiang Mai red mini-taxi (songtaew), the two most common vehicles plying the city's streets. Songtaew should cost a standard fee of 12 baht per journey anywhere in the city in the day time, though, once again, make sure you are both on the same page before embarking. Also make certain that the driver really knows where you want to go. Remember that most Thais can not read a map and are hopelessly bad at giving accurate directions.

If you are sensible you will find Chiang Mai one of the safest and most friendly places in the world.

Getting in and Out

By Car

Take Highway No. 1 (Phahonyothin Road) and turn to Highway No. 32 (Asia Highway) passing Ayutthaya, Angthong, Nakhon Sawan, then by Highway No. 11, from Tak, Lampang, Lamphun to Chiang Mai: a distance of 696 kilometres or 9 - 10 hours.

By Rail

Express and rapid trains leave for Chiang Mai from Hualamphong Station several times daily and the trip takes about 12 - 15 hours depending on the class. It is recommended to reserve seats in advance, especially for sleepers. For further information please contact Tel. 0 2220 4334 or call 1690 or visit www.railway.co.th Chiang Mai Railway Station Tel. 0 5324 2094

By Air

Domestic airlines. Thai Airways International Tel. 0 2280 0060, 0 2628 2000 or call 1566 or visit www.thaiairways.com Chiang Mai Office Tel. 0 5392 0999 and 0 5392 0920 Bangkok Airways Tel. 0 265 5555 or call 1771 or visit www.bangkokair.com Chiang Mai Office Tel. 0 5327 6176, 0 5328 1519 Air Asia Tel. 0 2515 9999 www.airasia.com Chiang Mai Office Tel. 0 5390 4800-3, 0 5392 2170 Orient Thai Airlines Tel. 0 2267 3210-5 or call 1126 or visit www.fly12go.com or email to reservationcenter@orient-thai.com Chiang Mai Office Tel. 0 5390 4606-9 Nok Air Tel. 0 2900 9955 or call 1318 or visit www.nokair.co.th Chiang Mai Office Tel. 0 5392 2183). All operate several daily flights between Bangkok and Chiang Mai. A one-way flight takes about one hour. There are also regular domestic flights between Chiang Mai and other major cities in Thailand and international flights to and from some major Asian destinations, e.g. Singapore, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur, run by Thai Airways International and other foreign airlines.

By Bus

Several ordinary and air-conditioned buses leave daily from Bangkok Bus Terminal (Jatujak) and it takes about 10 hours Tel. 0 2936 2841 -48 and 0 2936 2852- 66 ext. 442 or 311 There are also private buses which can be booked at the Bangkok Bus Terminal, the Bus Company or any licensed travel agent. For a reservation please contact Transport Co. Ltd. Tel. 0 2936 2852-66 www.transport.co.th Chiang Mai Office Tel. 0 5324 1449 Tanjit Tour Tel. 0 2936 3210 Nakornchai Air Tel. 0 2936 3355 www.nca.co.th New Wiriyayanyontra Tour Tel. 0 2936 2207 Sombat Tour Tel. 0 2936 2495-99 Sahacharn Tour Tel. 0 2936 2762 Siam First Tel. 0 2954 3601-7 Chiang Mai Arcade Bus station Tel. 0 5324 2664.

Once Here

Once you are in Chiang Mai you have three options for transportation: do it yourself, public transportation or taxi services.

Do it yourself is great if you are a confident driver. An international drivers' license should see you on the road either on a bicycle, motorbike or rented car, all of which are easily found throughout the city. Hiring a car and going on a road trip up country is the best way to go - good sign posting, great scenery, resorts and hotels dotted throughout the north. Public transportation is sketchy at this point, but [CLICK HERE](#) to see the bus route, which is constantly being improved upon, but still leaves a lot to be desired as there are limited routes and numbers of buses. Still, this is a cheap, cheerful, air-conditioned and safe way of getting around the city.

Chiang Mai has metered taxis which are probably the most expensive (but safe, and air-conditioned) form of transportation, though there are limited numbers and are easier to find in the city centre. The famous Thai tuk tuk are everywhere and you must bargain hard and get your fare settled before hopping in. Then there are the ubiquitous songtaew - converted pickup-trucks with seatings and a roof - which should cost a flat fee of 12 baht per inner-city trip, though once again, make sure that you and the driver are in agreement before jumping in.

Kam Muang

The Northern Thai language is spoken in the northernmost provinces of Thailand - the old Kingdom of Lanna - by some five million people, who refer to their language as **Kam Muang** or Yuan.

As central Siamese has been imposed as the national script in all schools, the Kam Muang script is being forgotten, except in some temples, although the language is still universally spoken.

Those familiar with the Siamese script will be baffled by Kam Muang, although the both are based on the Sanskrit alphabet.

Kam Muang, therefore, is not a debased dialect of Bangkok Thai, but is a distinct - and endangered - language.

Hill Tribes





The Akha

The Akha are arguably the most colourful and everyone's idea of what a hilltribe should look like. They are therefore the most well known minority by both the casual visitor and by academics looking for a PhD subject. The Akhazan-the way of life-is the guiding code to all Akha activities, from allocating land to how to conduct the ancestor ceremonies to building a house, it has the answer to how to do it the correct way. It is handed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next because there is no written language. A fun loving but hard working minority distributed from southern Yunnan, through Burma and Laos, to northern Thailand about 100 years ago, they are trying to adapt to modernization. There are numerous tours to **Akha villages surrounding Chiang Mai.**

The Hmong

The most independent and aggressive of tribes.

The Hmong are characterised by a desire to be left alone, to be independent. They will fight for space, for their future if they think it is threatened. In Thailand they sided with the communists because they were promised freedom; in Laos they sided with the anti-communist forces because communism threatened their culture. They are the most nomadic of the tribes, villages splitting and migrating to new areas to gain independence. Migrants to the USA have continued this mobility constantly moving to seek out new opportunities. Wherever they are they keep their traditions and as with all the other groups the most important is the New Year ceremony held at the end of the agricultural cycle, which usually coincides with the Christian Christmas or the new calendar year

The Karen

The Karen are the **longest established tribal group in Thailand.**

The Karen are the longest established tribal group in Thailand, excepting the Lua. They crossed the Salween River at least three hundred years ago and established themselves in the border areas. There are two main subgroups, the majority Skaw, and the Pwo in Thailand but many other affiliated groups in Burma. They speak a Tibeto-Burman language which linguists find very difficult to categorize. They tend to live in permanent settlements in the lower valleys cultivating wet or paddy rice. They are probably the best forest conservers of all the minorities. They are skilled weavers and make some of the finest baskets. They probably number about 400,000 but there have been recent large influxes from Burma as the authorities there have tried to suppress a long running independence movement.

The Lahu / Muser

The Lahu are probably the most christianized of the hilltribes with the possible exception of the Karen. Sir George Scott in his 'Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States' describes them as splendid men and good fighters. The tribal title of 'great hunter' recognizes their prowess with gun and crossbow. Today they are having problems integrating into mainstream society, as the substitute crops, in place of the traditional opium, do not provide enough for the daily necessities. Many wait for the arrival of a 'Messiah' to lead them into plenty and happiness.

The Lisu

The Lisu migrated into Thailand from Yunnan.

The Lisu migrated into Thailand from the area of the upper Salween River in Yunnan, they belong to the Lolo speaking linguistic group, together with the Lahu and the Akha, but unlike these tribes they do not have distinct sub groups. Physically they have the most beautiful women and the most handsome men and dancing at their New Year ceremony in their ceremonial costumes adorned with silver, they are a unique and moving spectacle. Marrying outside the tribe is fairly common because the man must pay a high bride price for a wife. They take life very seriously and the frustrations of dealing with bureaucracy, or in settling disputes, can easily lead to suicide or escape into the world of drugs.

The long necked Karen

The Padaung or long necked Karen are very recent immigrants into Thailand. There are three villagers near Mae Hong Son, in the far north west of Chiang Mai province, with were brought into Thailand by Thai entrepreneurs for the tourism market. These Padaung have no legal status in Thailand and are exploited as curiosities by camera toting tourists.

Ethnically they are Karen, they have taken ornamentation to an extreme where the women wear brass rings around their necks, which depress the collar bones, and the neck appears to be stretched. This is done from early childhood, adding a few rings at a time, until at adulthood their necks are remarkably long. The rings are not removed for bathing or sleeping and it is supported without the rings.

Do not visit them as they are kept in a human zoo with no freedom. They are not allowed to leave camp because their 'owners' can not exploit them if they do. Monies made from entrance fees and souvenirs go to the pockets of very nasty people indeed.

The Lawa or Lua

The original inhabitants of northern Thailand.

Probably the least known of the northern Thailand mountain minorities the **Lawa** are probably the most interesting. Books on the hilltribes tend to overlook them, and most anthropologists choose the more colourful groups for their PhD dissertations. The Lawa were the first people to inhabit the Chiang Mai valley in historic times and referred to in myth and legend. The Phu Sae Ya Sae or grandfather, grandmother spirits ceremony in which the god represented by Buddha, overcomes evil represented by a medium in a cannibalistic trance, is still performed annually every June near Chiang Mai city and has its origins in ancient Lawa ritual. Ancient grave sites and remnants of old settlements indicate a sophisticated people inhabited the area before the Thai arrived seven hundred years ago.

Today the Lawa have either fully assimilated into Thai society as in some villages in the Chiang Mai city area and only retain some of their language, or they have been marginalised into hilltribe villages in the Mae La Noi and Mae Chaem areas. They might sometimes be seen in the market at Mae Sariang. These hilltribe Lawa are mixing and intermarrying with the neighbouring Karen. They are not migratory, like many of the hilltribes, but live in settled villages that have been there for sometimes hundreds of years. They cultivate wet padi rice and sell vegetables and forest products to the local markets. In dress they are similar to the Karen except the women wear a short sarong with a lightening pattern, wear a lot of brightly coloured beads around their necks, and can occasionally be seen with black lacquered leg bands made of cane. Their language is of the Mon-Khmer group and they have many rituals and spirits of which the Karen are very afraid. According to some they may have been affiliated to the Wa at some time in the past, and although the Lawa and the Lua are usually assumed to be the same, there is evidence that they were quite separate ethnic groups.

The Yao or Mien are the most 'Chinese' of the minorities.

The Mien, or Yao as they are commonly known, probably migrated from southern coastal China in South East Asia about six hundred years ago. Legend says they arrived by sea first to Hainan, then to Vietnam and Laos and more recently into Thailand. Many fled the communists in Laos in the 1970's and, together with the Hmong, they were interred in refugee camps and a large number were accepted as immigrants into U.S.A.

The Mien are a homogenous minority living mostly in the Mae Chan area of Chiangrai province in northern Thailand. They are the only minority that has a tradition of writing, using Chinese script to record rituals, family records and contracts. Nowadays it is only the old men who can still read Chinese but the new generation are literate in Thai. They are good farmers and traders growing tea, coffee, fruit and vegetables for market. They have never been opium poppy growers. The Mien or Yao can be instantly identified by their costume. The women wear loose fitting, ankle length, pants heavily embroidered with cross stitch; their tunic is bordered with a red ruff and fastened with rectangular silver buckles. They also wear a large turban the ends of which are also embroidered. Like the Lisu and the Hmong they celebrate Chinese New Year with three days of feasting and merriment. Their religion is ancient Chinese Taoism and the ceremonies are performed by a priest assisted by a shaman, the gods are displayed in a pantheon of paintings, which are displayed during the most important rituals.

A desire for order guides the Mien's life. Politeness to one's fellows, adjust to local customs and laws, conduct all rituals and ceremonies properly and in accordance with the traditions, and balance the spiritual and the real worlds. Harmony, within whichever society they are living, will ensure a good life.

Other minorities

Minority groups who can be found in the north of Thailand but not necessarily in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces.

The Kaya. Recent immigrants into the Mae Hong Son area. They are from the Karen group of minorities fleeing persecution in Burma.

The Kareni. Another Karen group with the same problem as the Kaya.

The Mabri. A remnant population of a hunter/gather group found in Nan province and being moved into permanent mission settlements.

The Htin. A settled minority living in the lowlands of Nan province.

The Khmu or Kamu are a Mon-Khmer speaking minority who live mostly in Laos but also in the Laos border provinces of Thailand.

Special thanks to



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